

WASHINGTON- Congressman Todd Akin, a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee, will testify at the hearing on Open Burn Pit Registry Act (H.R. 3337), that seeks to establish a registry for veteran's who have been exposed to burn pits while serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The hearing is at 4:00PM EDT in 334 Cannon House Office Building and video should be streamed on <http://veterans.house.gov/>.

The following is Akin's written testimony to be delivered to the committee on April 16th.

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Testimony before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health

EMBARGOED UNTIL 4:00PM EDT, April 16, 2012

Chairwoman Buerkle, Ranking Member Michaud, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding my bill, H.R. 3337, the Open Burn Pit Registry Act. As of today, this bill has over fifty bipartisan cosponsors and has been endorsed by a wide range of veterans' organizations.

The issue of burn pit exposure first came to my attention through veterans in my district who served honorably in Iraq and Afghanistan and are now suffering serious health effects apparently linked to exposure to burn pits. Let me share one short story.

Tim Wymore is a Missouri Guardsman suffering from the effects of working around burn pits while deployed to Iraq in 2004 and 2005. If his wife Shanna were here today, she would tell you of the dramatic impact burn pits have had on the life of her husband and hundreds of others she

has gotten to know as a result of fighting for Tim's treatment.

For nearly a year before contacting my office, as Tim's health continued to deteriorate, Shanna Wymore fought an often indifferent and sometimes hostile V.A. medical system trying to get care for her husband's unexplained illnesses. Tim, once a strong, athletic machinist, was suffering debilitating bouts of abdominal pain, weight loss and fatigue. Despite the adversity, Shanna persisted in her fight to get the help her husband was both entitled too and deserved. Along the way, she became an expert on burn pits and the growing number of Iraq war veterans suffering the effects of their exposure.

After more than two years of indecision and broken promises, with assistance from my District staff, the VA finally agreed to send Tim to the Mayo Clinic. The doctors there confirmed, what the VA had long denied, Tim was suffering the effects of what could only be attributed to the work he performed around the burn pits in Iraq.

I have had at least one other constituent, Aubrey Tapley, who has suffered the consequences of burn pit exposure and who has strongly advocated for taking proactive steps to help others who may be suffering from burn pit exposure.

Unfortunately, the health consequences of burn pit exposure are hard to understand and difficult to prove. Last fall the Institute of Medicine released a report which concluded in part that there is insufficient data available to determine the long-term health effects of exposure to burn pits and that more study is warranted.

The intent of my bill is to establish a registry at the Department of Veterans Affairs for those individuals who may have been exposed to open burn pits during their military service. This would help the Department study the issue more effectively and enable them to communicate to interested veterans as medical research on this issue develops. This registry would not affect the benefits any veteran is already entitled to receive, but would help the Department take better care of our veterans.

The experience I have had with veterans in my district is enough to convince me that we need to be proactive about studying and analyzing the potential health effects of open burn pits. We have sent our best and brightest young men and women into harm's way, and it is our

responsibility as a nation to take care of them when they return. Although there is a small cost for this bill, I think it is an affordable and reasonable approach to dealing with the issue of open burn pits, and I ask your subcommittee to support this bill and consider moving it forward.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

BACKGROUND:

Further details on the bill are available here: http://akin.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1678&Itemid=104

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